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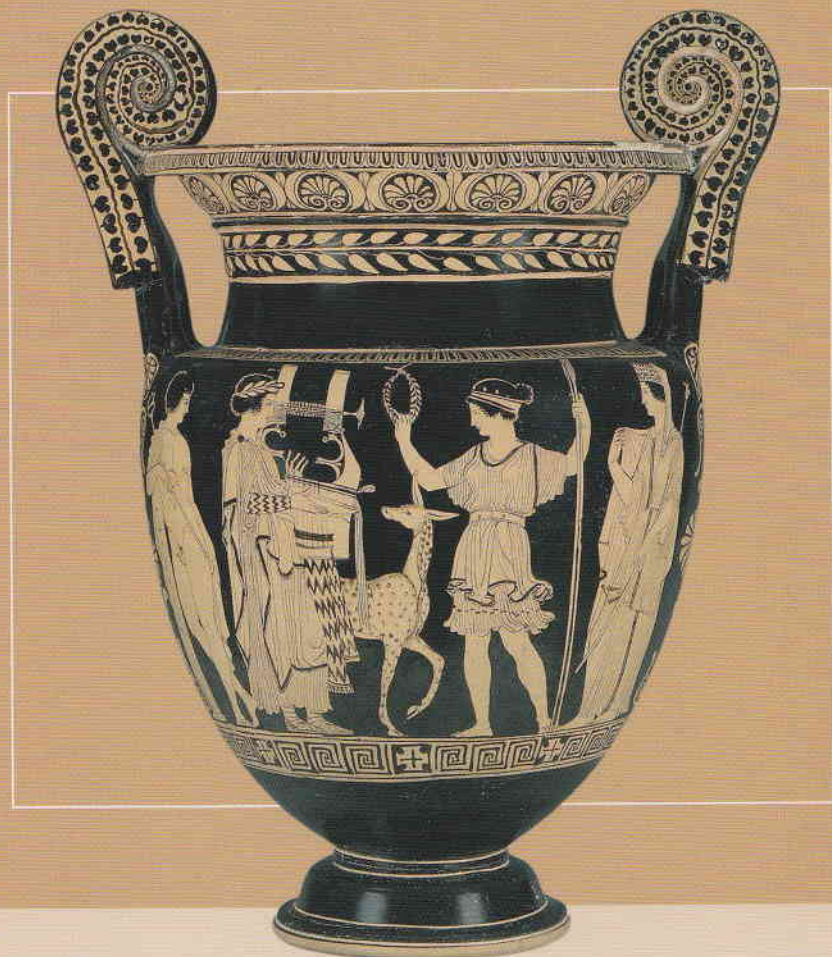
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Edinburgh Leventis Studies 5

THE GODS OF ANCIENT GREECE

IDENTITIES AND TRANSFORMATIONS



Edited by Jan N. Bremmer and Andrew Erskine

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CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS AND GREEK GODS

Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta

Greek gods and polytheism as a distinctive feature of Graeco-Roman culture and religion were favourite themes among the Christian apologists of the second century. In an attempt to promote monotheism as characteristic of Christian religion, the apologists not only presented pagan religion as a typically polytheistic belief, but also established the ‘disarmingly simple model . . . according to which mankind . . . had progressed from polytheism to monotheism under the catalytic action of Christianity’.¹ This idea was pushed so far that the evolutionary model was altered and polytheism presented as a temporary involution: as a corruption of the original monotheism, polytheism had its roots in the transgression committed by Adam and Eve. Since then human beings had surrendered to externalities and sensualism, as a result of which polytheism and its concomitant idolatry established itself as the way, *par excellence*, to channel human religious experience.²

Strange though it may seem, these conceptions are not confined to antiquity and the Middle Ages, however. On the one hand, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), at the end of the eighteenth century, and the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), in the middle of the nineteenth, are both representatives of the evolutionary model.³ On

1 P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 7.

2 For a precedent for the idea about an original form of monotheism in Paul’s letter to the Romans, see G. H. van Kooten, ‘Pagan and Jewish monotheism according to Varro, Plutarch and St. Paul: the aniconic, monotheistic beginnings of Rome’s pagan cult – Romans 1:19–25 in a Roman context’, in A. Hilhorst et al. (eds), *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of Florentino García Martínez* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 633–51 at 637 = Van Kooten, *Paul’s Anthropology in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 346–7.

3 See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, tr. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (New York: Harper and Row, 1963 [Edinburgh, 1928]), p. 34, *apud* N. MacDonald, ‘The origins of monotheism’, in L. T. Stuckenbruck and W. W.

the other, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–87), at the end of the seventeenth century, established the scheme according to which monotheism was not only the climax of the spiritual and theological evolution, but also the original, pure and spiritual religion.⁴

However interesting, monotheism is not the main focus of my chapter. The theme has recently been thoroughly dealt with in the volume *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* edited by Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede.⁵ The articles included in that study sufficiently dismantle the artificial cliché by dealing with the issue from several perspectives. Notwithstanding this, the polarity polytheism–monotheism and Christianity's attempts to present itself as the only licit form of monotheism do represent the background against which the apologists' attack on the Graeco-Roman gods must be projected.

Instead I shall focus on the ways and the arguments used by Christian apologists to reject polytheism and pagan deities as well as to vindicate the superiority of their creed. In order to do so I shall restrict my field of investigation to the second century. This choice is not arbitrary, however. It is in this period that Christianity first achieves and delineates its own identity, due to both external and internal pressures. Moreover, the apologists of the second century provide enough material to allow the analysis of the gradual development of motifs used against pagan deities.

I intend to offer an overview of the apologists' opinions which, obviating questions of detail, may allow us to observe both the authors' view of the Greek gods and the place they occupy in the group as a whole. All apologetic treatises of this period include a variety of attacks on pagan deities. Interestingly, in their criticism of Greek gods, apologists are not wholly independent of one another. It is possible both to trace the origin of the main motifs and to see them developing over the years. There are some differences, however. As we move through the second century we can appreciate a gradual increase

S. North (eds), *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), pp. 204–15 at 213: 'As such subordinate stages, we set down, generally speaking, Idol-worship proper (also called Fetishism) and Polytheism; of which again, the first stands lower than the second. The idol worshipper may quite well have only one idol, but this does not give such Monolatry any resemblance to Monotheism, for it ascribes to the idol an influence over a limited field of objects of processes, beyond which its own interest and sympathy do not extend'; F. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974 [1842]).

4 H. More, *The Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London: J. Fleisher and W. Morden, 1660).

5 Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism*, pp. 1–2.

in arguments. Old themes remain, but beside them there appear new issues intended to give the apologists' censure of Greek religion a somewhat more solid appearance.

With a view to analysing this development of motifs, my exposition is thematically organized. The first section deals with the rejection of idolatry, the second evaluates the more ethical approach regarding the behaviour of Graeco-Roman gods, and the third part focuses on the criticism of the philosophical approaches to divinity. I will end with some conclusions based on the previous analysis.

1 THE JEWISH BACKGROUND: IDOLATRY

When approaching the first apologetic or proto-apologetic treatise, to wit the *Kerygma Petri* (*KP*), we realize that we are still exclusively moving within the conceptual world of Judaism. The *Preaching of Peter*, a text dated to the beginnings of the second century and probably composed in Egypt,⁶ is transmitted fragmentarily, mainly but not exclusively in different works by Clement of Alexandria, who quotes extensively from it,⁷ but it also briefly quoted and referred to by Origen and John of Damascus.⁸

In line with Judaeo-Christian monotheism, one of the main objectives of the preserved sections of *KP* is to stress that 'there is one God who created the beginning of all things and who has power over their end'.⁹ Immediately afterwards, *KP* adds a statement that might be seen as a rudiment of negative theology: according to fragment 2a,

6 Some scholars have attempted to offer a more precise date. So, for example, D. W. Palmer, 'Atheism, apologetic and negative theology in the Greek apologists of the second century', *VigChris* 37 (1983), pp. 234–59 at 238, proposes the year AD 110; H. Paulsen, 'Das Kerygma Petri und die urchristliche Apologetik', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 88 (1977), pp. 1–37, dates it between AD 100 and 120; E. von Dobschütz, *Das Kerygma Petri kritisch* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893), more carefully dates it roughly between 80 and 140.

7 Most fragments derive from several passages from *Stromata*, but frag. 1c is preserved in *Eclogae propheticae* 58, on which see W. Rordorf, 'Christus als Logos und Nomos: Das Kerygma Petri in seinem Verhältnis zu Justin', in A. M. Ritter (ed.), *Kerygma und Logos: Beiträge zu den geistlichen Beziehungen zwischen Antike und Christentum. Festschrift für Carl Andresen zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 424–34, and Paulsen, 'Das Kerygma', pp. 24–5. See, for the reconstruction of the Greek text, von Dobschütz, *Das Kerygma*, pp. 18–27.

8 Origen, *On John* XIII, 104; *De princip.* I, prol. 8; John of Damascus, *Sacra parallela*, A 12 (PG 95, col. 1158); Gregory of Nazianzus, *ep.* 16 and 20 (PG 37, cols 49–50 and 53–6).

9 *KP* 2a (*apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 6.5.39.2): γινώσκετε οὖν ὅτι εἷς θεός ἐστιν, ὃς ἀρχὴν πάντων ἐποίησεν, καὶ τέλους ἐξουσίαν ἔχων, tr. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 22.

God is ‘the Invisible (ἀόρατος) who sees all things; the uncontainable (ἀχώρητος), who contains all things; the One who needs nothing (ἀνεπιδεής), of whom all things stand in need’.¹⁰

Admittedly, at first sight, these ideas might be connected with middle Platonism.¹¹ A closer look, however, reveals that the matter is not as simple as it may seem. To begin with, differently from middle Platonic texts, the formulation includes not only negative but also positive descriptions. Also important is the fact that some of the terms used here do not appear in a Platonic context but only in Judaeo-Christian sources. As has been pointed out,¹² terms such as ἀόρατος are not applied to God either by Plato or by Alcinous,¹³ but they are widely attested in Jewish portions of the *Oracula Sibyllina* (frag. 1, 8), in a pseudo-Orphic poem of Jewish origin quoted by Clement of Alexandria,¹⁴ and by Paul in the Letter to the Colossians (1.15). Also, the term ἀχώρητος is found only in the context of Judaeo-Christianity.¹⁵ Finally, references to God as being beyond any need (ἀνεπιδεής) are attested in middle Platonic contexts,¹⁶ but they also appear in the *Letter of Aristeas* (211), in Josephus (*Ant.* 8.111), and in Philo (*Leg. alleg.* 2.2). It thus seems reasonable to describe this passage, with Daniélou, as a ‘common-place of Jewish missionary style’ in the context of the criticism of idolatry.¹⁷

In line with this Jewish background, fragment 2b introduces an attack on pagan idolatry which completely relies on Jewish sources. The motif will be recurrent from now on in most apologetic treatises,

10 KP 2a (*apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 6.5.39.3): ὁ ἀόρατος, ὃς τὰ πάντα ὁρᾷ, ἀχώρητος, ὃς τὰ πάντα χωρεῖ, ἀνεπιδεής, οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐπιδέεται καὶ δι’ ὃν ἔστιν, ἀκατάληπτος, ἀένναος, ἀφθαρτος, ἀποίητος, ὃς τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν λόγῳ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ, tr. Elliot, *Apocryphal New Testament*, with some changes.

11 See Alcinous, *Didask.* 10.3.

12 A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste. IV: Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (Paris: Gabalda, 1954), p. 106; see also J. Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 326 n. 12.

13 See, however, the term in plural applied by Alcinous, *Didask.*, 15.1 to daemons, but not in the sense we are dealing with. It appears three more times (7.4; 13.1; 17.1), but in all three cases it has the daily sense ‘invisible’.

14 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.12.78.4.

15 Hermas, 26.2.1–2: καὶ πάντα χωρῶν, μόνος δὲ ἀχώρητος ὢν. An extended search in the TLG indeed reveals that the term, as applied to God, first appear in Hermas in order to reappear in Irenaeus, Gregorius Nazianzenus and other later Christian Platonists.

16 Other variants for the same concept are ἀνευδεής or ἀπροσδεής: Alcinous, *Didask.* 10.3 (ἀπροσδεής); *CH* 6.1 (οὔτε γὰρ ἐνδεής ἐστί τις).

17 See B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1955), pp. 215–18; Daniélou, *Gospel Message*, p. 325, and Palmer, ‘Atheism’, n. 34, who relies on Daniélou.

which include only tiny differences due to the character and style of the apologist in question.¹⁸ Referring to pagans, *KP* says that:

ὅτι ἀγνοία φερόμενοι καὶ μὴ ἐπιστάμενοι τὸν θεὸν <ὡς ἡμεῖς κατὰ τὴν γνῶσιν τὴν τελείαν>, ὧν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν εἰς χρῆσιν, μορφώσαντες ξύλα καὶ λίθους, χαλκὸν καὶ σίδηρον, χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον, τῆς ὕλης αὐτῶν καὶ χρήσεως, τὰ δοῦλα τῆς ὑπάρξεως ἀναστήσαντες σέβονται ἃ δέδωκεν αὐτοῖς εἰς βρῶσιν ὁ θεός¹⁹

For actuated by ignorance and not knowing God . . . they have fashioned into figures that over which He has given them the power of disposal for use, (namely) stocks and stones, brass and iron, gold and silver; and <forgetting> their material use, have set up and worship (as gods) that which should have served them as subsistence.

Palmer rightly stresses the Jewish provenance of the motif,²⁰ but he seems to go too far in his attempts to downplay the influence of Greek philosophers altogether.²¹ Ultimately, the clearest precedent for this passage is a famous section of *Wisdom* (13.1–15),²² a text that heavily relies on Greek philosophy.²³

18 For the rejection of idolatry in paganism, see below n. 21 and F. Graf, 'Plutarch und die Götterbilder', in R. Hirsch-Luipold (ed.), *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 251–66. For a precedent in Romans see above n. 2. See *Epistle to Diognetus* 2.2–3 and 2.7; Aristides 13.3; Justin, I *Apol.* 9.2; Athenagoras, *Suppl.* 26; Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.2; Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* IV 46.30–47, etc. On the issue, see P. C. Finney, 'Idols in second and third century apology', *Studia Patristica* 17/2 (1982), pp. 684–7.

19 *KP* fr. 2b, tr. R. McL. Wilson, in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, tr. R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: Clarke, 1992), pp. 34–41 at 38.

20 For the Jewish background, see Isaiah 44.9–20; Jeremiah 10.1–16; Psalm 15.1–8.

21 Palmer, 'Atheism', p. 255 and n. 37. For the rejection of idolatry in antiquity see Heraclitus B5 D–K; Herodotus 2.172; Plato, *Leg.* 931A; Timaeus *FrGH* 566 F 32; Horace, *Sat.* 1.8; Philo, *Decal.* 76; *Leg. alleg.* 1.6; Epictetus 2.8.20; Lucian, *Jup. Conf.* 8; *Jup. Trag.* 7; *Somn.* 24. In general, see P. Decharme, *La critique des traditions religieuses chez les grecs des origines au temps de Plutarque* (Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1966 [1904]).

22 Compare *Wisdom* 13.1: οἷς παρῆν θεοῦ ἀγνοσία; 13.10–13: ἐκάλεσαν θεοὺς ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον . . . ἢ λίθον ἄχρηστον . . . ξύλον σκολιὸν καὶ ὄζοις συμπεφυκὸς . . . ἀπέικασεν αὐτὸ εἰκόνι ἀνθρώπου.

23 On which see H. I. Marrou, *A Diognete: introduction, édition critique, traduction et commentaire* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1965), p. 108, and, more recently, J. M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 50–62; C. Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon* (Paris: Gabalda, 1985), pp. 748–67; M. Kepper, *Hellenistische Bildung im Buch der Weisheit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), pp. 170–87. A detailed analysis of *Wisdom* 13.1–19 can be found in D. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), pp. 247–68, who provides a large number of parallels.

The same applies to the theme, included immediately afterwards, of the sacrifices offered to pagan divinities:

πετεινὰ τοῦ ἀέρος καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τὰ νηκτὰ καὶ τῆς γῆς τὰ ἐρπετὰ καὶ τὰ θηρία σὺν κτήνεσι τετραπόδοις τοῦ ἀγροῦ, γαλαῖς τε καὶ μῦς, αἰλούρους τε καὶ κύνας καὶ πιθήκους καὶ τὰ ἴδια βρώματα βρωτοῖς θύματα θύουσιν καὶ νεκρὰ νεκροῖς προσφέροντες ὥς θεοῖς ἀχαριστοῦσι τῷ θεῷ διὰ τούτων ἀρνούμενοι αὐτὸν εἶναι²⁴

That also which God has given them for food, the fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea, the creeping things of the earth with the four-footed beasts of the field, weasels and mice, cats, dogs and apes; and that which should serve them as food they sacrifice . . . and offering what is dead to the dead as though they were gods, they are unthankful towards God since they thereby deny his existence.

KP's criticism follows Jewish precedents,²⁵ although it is also true that the new sensibility that rejects the shedding of blood and claims a 'rational sacrifice' is a common topic in the first centuries of the Christian era.²⁶

The second representative of this trend of criticism is the *Epistle to Diognetus* (*ED*), a text whose date of composition is still a matter of controversy today. The table included in Marrou's edition gives a good idea of the wide range of dates postulated for this peculiar piece of writing, from the first to the sixteenth century.²⁷ Most scholars, however, agree that the text should be placed somewhere in the second century. Given its clear contacts both with *KP* and with Aristides (below), and taking into consideration the exclusively Jewish character and contents of its attack on paganism, we prefer a date in the early second century, and more precisely a date between *KP* and Aristides.²⁸

24 *KP* 2b, tr. R. McL. Wilson, in Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, pp. 34–41 at 38.

25 Isaiah 1.11–13; Hosea 6.6.

26 In a Jewish context, see *Test. Levi* 3.6: λογικὴ καὶ ἀναίματος θυσία; Romans 12.1, λογικὴ λατρεία, on which see Van Kooten, 'Pagan and Jewish monotheism', pp. 648–9 = Van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context*, pp. 356, 388–91; 1 Peter 2.5: πνευματικαὶ θυσίαι; see *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.31: λογικαὶ θυσίαι ἄγναι; 13.21; Porphyry 2.45.19: νοεῶν θυσία. See also E. Pagels and K. King, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Viking Press, 2007), ch. 3, 'Sacrifice and the life of the spirit'.

27 Together with Marrou, *A Diognete*, see also J. J. Thierry, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

28 See, however, R. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), pp. 178–9, who dates the text after AD 176, although on rather questionable grounds. More convincing are the arguments issued by

For the first time, we now find not only a reference to but also a development of the Jewish literary topos on idolatry. Taking its starting point from clear Old Testament models, *ED* goes on to deride pagan deities. Thus *ED* 2.2 compares stone idols to pavements we tread on;²⁹ bronze and ceramic images are ridiculed due to their being of even lesser value than utensils;³⁰ and iron and wooden ones because they cannot protect themselves from rust and corrosion.³¹

Criticism, however, is not only levelled on the grounds of the idols' corruptible materials. *ED* 2.3 goes on to affirm that man-made objects which could easily be transformed into different objects or else be destroyed altogether should not be considered gods.³² Later apologists will approach this argument from the perspective of negative theology in order to deny that ephemeral objects may be considered gods at all.³³ *ED*, however, still sticks to the *via analogiae* and, even though occasionally including negative descriptions of God, it follows Wisdom in claiming that God's existence should be deduced from his creation.³⁴

2 THE MYTHICAL BACKGROUND: THE IMMORALITY OF PAGAN GODS

As we move on in the second century, a new weapon in the apologists' attack on pagan religion is the focus on mythology with a view

(footnote 28 *continued*)

Marrou, *A Diognete*, pp. 259–65, who dates it to c.190–200, although admitting the close resemblances between *ED* and the old apologetic style, as represented by *KP* and Aristides, and explaining them as due to the author's will to compose the first apologetic part of his treatise (chs 2 to 4) in the manner of these old precedents (at 260).

29 Deuteronomy 4.28; Isaiah 44.9–20; Jeremiah 10.3–5.

30 See *Ep. Jer.* (Baruch 6) 17; Wisdom 13.11–12.

31 *Ep. Jer.* (Baruch 6) 11, 19.

32 Jeremiah 10.3–5; Habakkuk 2.18–19; *Ep. Jer.* (Baruch 6) 7–29 and 44–58.

33 See Aristides 13.1–2; Justin, I *Apol.* 9.2; Tatian, *Oratio* 4; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autol.* I 10; Athenagoras 15.1–2; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.1; Tertullian, *Apol.* 12.7; cf. 40.9 and Marrou, *A Diognete*, p. 106 n. 4.

34 Wisdom 13.5, 'For from the greatness and beauty of created things, is their author correspondingly perceived.' The method had a long history and extensive use, however. See, in general, Plato, *Rep.* 442E ff; *Philebus* 55A; 64D ff; *Leg.* 903B; *Gorgias* 497D; *Phd.* 78B ff etc.; Xenophon, *Cyrop.* 8.7.17; Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 399B 15; Philo, *Somn.* 1.204, *Decal.* 60, *Abr.* 71 ff. As applied to theology and the perception of divinity, Diogenes of Apollonia B 3 DK; Plato, *Philebus* 28E, *Leg.* 886A; Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.4.2–19; Aristotle, fr. 12a Ross; Epicurus, *Peri phys.* 26.30.2–3, on which Sextus Emp., *Math.* 9.45; Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 399B–400A; Seneca, *De beneficiis* 4.6; Epictetus 1.6. See also, in the context of middle Platonism, Philo, *Leg alleg.* 3.97–103, *Praem.* 41–2, *Spec.* 1.33 ff, 3.187–9.

to disproving the anthropomorphism of Greek deities.³⁵ Criticism of anthropomorphism, however, required a better definition of the divine, and the apologists resort to Greek philosophy in the search for their conceptual artillery.

In addition to Plato, it was Aristotle, Epicurus and middle Platonism that provided the most suitable models. Indeed, when properly selected, these philosophical texts offered outstanding material both for establishing a solid basis for Christian monotheistic pretensions and for constructing an apologetic discourse following Greek precedents that could find acceptance among pagan addressees. It is in this context that we first encounter the negative approach to the definition of God. Whereas the *via analogiae* reigns in the first apologetic treatises based on Jewish models, which already appeared in Wisdom (13.5), in line with the conceptual developments of the period, authors from the middle of the second century onwards embrace the *via negativa*,³⁶ which in a last analysis proceeds from the definitions provided in the 'first hypothesis' of Plato's *Parmenides*.³⁷

The first author known to make use of this approach is Aristides. The *Apology of Aristides* is preserved completely only in Syriac, although we also possess a couple of Armenian fragments, a Greek version of the text identified by J. A. Robinson in the eight-century Greek novel *Barlaam and Josaphat* (27), and a couple of Greek fragments.³⁸ According to Eusebius, Aristides delivered his apology to the emperor Hadrian on the occasion of the emperor's visit to Athens (124–5), but the Syriac version reports that it was dedicated to Antoninus Pius (138–61),³⁹ allowing in this way a later date, probably to c. 140.

35 For the anthropomorphism of the Greek gods see Henrichs, this volume, Chapter 1.

36 On the use of the *via negativa* in the definition of God by the apologists, see Palmer, 'Atheism', *passim*.

37 See E. R. Dodds, 'The Parmenides of Plato and the origin of Neoplatonic "One"', *CQ* 22 (1928), pp. 129–42 at 140, who suggests that this interpretation might originate in Speusippus, who according to Aetius (*ap. Stobaeus* 1.1.29 [58H]) separated the One from the νοῦς and according to Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1092a 11–15) conceived the One as ὑπερουσίον or at least as ἀνοῦσίον; see Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, pp. 79–91.

38 J. R. Harris and J. A. Robinson, *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians: With an Appendix Containing the Main Portion of the Original Greek Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893); with Armenian fragments in English translations on pp. 27–34; for the Greek fragments see also *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 15.1778; *Papyrus London* (Literary) 223, on which see H. J. M. Milne, 'A new fragment of the apology of Aristides', *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1923–4), pp. 773–7. Quotations mostly follow the Syriac text (English tr. with notes pp. 35–64; Syriac text pp. 119–47), since the Greek version has been shown to be epitomizing; see Harris and Robinson, *The Apology*, pp. 70–4.

39 Eusebius, *HE* 4.3.2, states that both Quadratus' and Aristides' *Apologies* were delivered in this context. The Armenian fragments do support Eusebius'

At the outset of the work, both the Syriac and the Greek versions include a definition of God that relies on Aristotle's Unmoved Mover: 'the world and all that is therein are moved by the power of another; and . . . he who moves them is God . . . And it is manifest that that which causes motion is more powerful than that which is moved.'⁴⁰ Aristides then proceeds to define God negatively, namely by abstracting all the attributes which could be predicated to him: 'Now I say that God is not begotten, not made; a constant nature, without beginning and without end; immortal, complete and incomprehensible.'⁴¹ Interestingly enough, however, Aristides does not simply endorse the known negative attributes current in middle Platonism, but also paraphrases them in a way similar to Gnostic texts such as *Sophia Jesu Christi* and the *Apocryphon Johannis*:⁴²

Now when I say that he is 'perfect', this means that there is not in him any defect, and he is not in need of anything but all things are in need of him. And when I say that he is 'without beginning', this means that everything which has beginning has also an end, and that which has an end may be brought to an end. He has no name, for everything which has a name is kindred to things created.⁴³

On the basis of this definition of God, Aristides proceeds to criticize the religion of the Egyptians, Greeks and Jews. Interested as he is in

(footnote 39 *continued*)

affirmation, but the Greek text in the novel *Barlaam and Josaphat* lacks any dedication whatsoever and the Syriac version is dedicated to the emperor Caesar Titus Hadrianus Antoninus. According to R. M. Grant, 'The chronology of the Greek apologists', *VigChris* 9 (1955), pp. 25–33 at 25, Eusebius might have confused this emperor with Hadrian. However, Grant's suggestion that it was composed after 143 when Fronto was *consul suffectus*, as a reaction to a supposed writing against Christians by the famous rhetorician, is not convincing. On the lack of evidence for such a writing see my 'The early Christians and human sacrifice', in J. N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 81–102.

40 Syriac: Aristides 1.8–14 (Harris, p. 35); Greek: 1.4–7 (Robinson, p. 100): ἰδὼν δὲ τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα, ὅτι κατὰ ἀνάγκην κινεῖται, συνῆκα τὸν κινουῖν καὶ διακρατοῦντα εἶναι θεόν. πᾶν γὰρ τὸ κινεῖν ἰσχυρότερον τοῦ κινουμένου καὶ τὸ διακρατοῦν ἰσχυρότερον τοῦ διακρατουμένου ἐστίν.

41 Syriac: Aristides 1.22–23 (Harris, p. 35); Greek: 1.8–11 (Robinson, p. 100): αὐτὸν οὖν λέγω εἶναι θεόν τὸν συστήσαντα τὰ πάντα καὶ διακρατοῦντα, ἄναρχον καὶ αἰδίων, ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀπροσδεῖ, ἀνώτερον πάντων τῶν παθῶν καὶ ἐλαττωμάτων, ὀργῆς τε καὶ λήθης καὶ ἀγνοίας καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν.

42 W. C. van Unnik, 'Die Gotteslehre bei Aristides und in den gnostischen Schriften', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 17 (1961), pp. 166–74.

43 I follow the Syriac version, of which I include the English translation by Harris. Greek parallels to the Syriac are included in the notes. Syriac: Aristides 1.24–30. The Greek omits the section.

demonstrating the high standards of Christian morality (below), his main point is to show that the gods' immorality is a bad example for the citizens. Aristides' criticism first focuses on the imperfection of Greek gods, both moral and physical, in order to continue afterwards with a long list of aspects that do not fit his definition of the divine. It is in chapter 8 of the Syriac version that we find the first attack on pagan deities, and its introductory lines already advance the predictable themes of the following chapters:

Some of their gods were found to be adulterers and murderers, and jealous and envious, and angry and passionate, and murderers of fathers, thieves and plunderers; and they say that some of them were lame and maimed; some of them wizards, and some of them utterly mad, etc.⁴⁴

After the short introduction, the rest of chapter 8 and chapter 9 focus on immorality and include mythological examples thereof, such as the story of Kronos and Rhea and how Zeus castrated his father (9.20–34). Aristides then goes on to criticize Zeus' protean nature, not, as one would expect, because change is alien to the definition of God, but because Zeus' metamorphosis is a means to seduce innumerable females and produce a large number of children (9.35–16). Aristides' conclusion is clear:

Because of these stories, O king, much evil has befallen the race of men . . . since they imitate their gods, and commit adultery, and are defiled with their mothers and sisters, and in sleeping with males: and some even have dared to kill their fathers. For if he, who is said to be the head and king of their gods, has done these things, how much more shall his worshippers imitate him!⁴⁵

From chapter 10 onwards, Aristides concentrates on the physical and moral defects of particular gods: Hephaistos is lame and has to keep himself (10.29–34); Hermes is a greedy thief (10.35ff); Asklepios also has to work and dies struck by lightning; Ares is jealous and greedy;

44 Syriac: Aristides 8.22–26 (Harris, p. 40); Greek: 8.5–8 (Robinson, p. 104): οὓς ἐκεῖνοι αὐτοὶ ἐξέθεντο μοιχοὺς εἶναι καὶ φονεῖς, ὀργίλους καὶ ζηλωτὰς καὶ θυμαντικούς, πατροκτόνους, καὶ ἀδελφο-κτόνους, κλέπτας καὶ ἄρπαγας χολοὺς καὶ κυλλοὺς καὶ φαρμακοὺς καὶ μαινομένους.

45 Syriac: Aristides 9.17–28 (Harris, p. 41); Greek: 8.16–20 (Robinson, p. 104): εἰ γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ αὐτῶν τοιαῦτα ἐποίησαν, πῶς καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐ τοιαῦτα πράξουσιν; ἐκ τούτων οὖν τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων τῆς πλάνης συνέβη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πολέμους ἔχειν συχνοὺς καὶ σφαγὰς καὶ αἰχμαλωσίας πικράς. Ch. 9 omits any reference.

Dionysos is a drunkard, and so forth. Chapter 10 further enumerates the defects of other godly figures. The most striking example is his critique of Artemis on the grounds that ‘it is disgraceful that a maid should go about by herself on mountains and follow the chase of beasts. And therefore it is not possible that Artemis should be a goddess’ (10.9–12).

After a brief excursus on the topic of idolatry in chapter 13 that focuses on the known description of idols as ‘dead and senseless images’, unable to ensure their own preservation and manufactured of low materials, Aristides arrives at chapter 15, in which he presents the Christian God and morality as exactly the opposite of what has been shown in the preceding chapters.

A similar combination of motifs can be found in the first *Apology* of Justin, written c.150.⁴⁶ On the one hand, criticism of idolatry focuses on the known commonplaces of manufacture and materials, while sacrifices are rejected on the grounds that they imply that the gods are in need, and this is impossible.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Justin attacks Greek gods for their alleged immorality. In spite of the similarities with previous apologetic treatises, he represents a new approach to the matter. Most of his references to Greek deities are included in an obvious *ad hominem* argument, in so far as he does not defend Christians from the criticism levelled against their beliefs, but just provides parallels from Greek mythology in an attempt to exonerate the alleged inconsistencies of Christian religion.

The *tu quoque* fallacy is clear in chapter 21 of his *Apology* and intends to validate the Christian creed that Jesus, the Son of God and produced without sexual union, ‘was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven’,⁴⁸ by referring to a number of mythical

46 For this date see M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994) 11, who builds on Harnack’s dating to ‘ein paar Jahre nach 150’ (A. Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* II.1 [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1954 (Leipzig, 1897)], p. 278).

47 Justin, *I Apol.* 9, *passim*, 20.14 and 58.11–12, *Dial.* 35.6. See his rejection that God is in need in *I Apol.* 10.2–4, ‘Ἄλλ’ οὐ δέεσθαι τῆς παρὰ ἀνθρώπων ὑλικῆς προσφορᾶς προσεληφάμεν τὸν θεόν, αὐτὸν παρέχοντα πάντα ὁρῶντες· ἐκείνους δὲ προσδέχεσθαι αὐτὸν μόνον δεδιδάγμεθα καὶ πεπείσμεθα καὶ πιστεύομεν, τοὺς τὰ προσόντα αὐτῷ ἀγαθὰ μμουμένους, σωφροσύνην καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ φιλανθρωπίαν καὶ ὅσα οἰκεῖα θεῷ ἐστι, τῷ μηδενὶ ὀνόματι θεῷ καλουμένῳ. Greek text according to Marcovich, *Iustini*.

48 Justin, *Apologia Maior* 21.1–4, Τῷ δὲ καὶ τὸν λόγον, ὃ ἐστὶ πρῶτον γέννημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἄνευ ἐπιμυξίας φάσκειν ἡμᾶς γεγεννησθαι, Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν διδάσκαλον ἡμῶν, καὶ τοῦτον σταυρωθέντα καὶ ἀποθανόντα καὶ ἀναστάντα ἀνεληλυθέναι εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. English translations according to A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library. 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1867).

examples.⁴⁹ If divine figures, whether or not originally divine, such as Asklepios, Dionysos, Herakles, the Dioskouroi, Perseus, Bellerophon and Ariadne, were also transported to heaven after death, he seems to argue, there is no need to ridicule Christian beliefs.⁵⁰

Having done this, he proceeds, in the second part of the same chapter, to deny all moral authority to Greek gods.⁵¹ He wonders how it is possible to believe in a god like Zeus,

ὥς καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν ἡγεμόνα καὶ γεννήτορα πάντων κατ' αὐτοὺς Δία πατροφόντην τε καὶ πατρὸς τοιούτου γεγονέναι, ἔρωτί τε κακῶν καὶ αἰσχυρῶν ἡδονῶν ἤττω γενόμενον ἐπὶ Γανυμήδην καὶ τὰς πολλὰς μοιχευθείσας γυναῖκας ἐλθεῖν, καὶ τοὺς αὐτοῦ παῖδας τὰ ὅμοια πράξαντας παραδέξασθαι.⁵²

the governor and creator of all things, [who] was both a parricide and the son of a parricide, and that being overcome by the love of base and shameful pleasures, he came in to Ganymede and those many women whom he had violated and that his sons did like actions.

His answer to this question appears in his theory that Greek mythology was in fact a forgery of Moses' prophecies committed by demons in order to prevent people from coming to know the truth.⁵³ Incidentally, we now realize that in choosing some mythical persons (such as Dionysos, Bellerophon, Perseus, Herakles and Asklepios)

49 Exactly the same approach can be found in his second *Apology*. Ch. 12 intends to exonerate Christians from the false accusations levelled against them, by attributing them to the instigation of evil demons. According to Justin, the accusations were false; but even if they were not, pagan religion includes enough examples of such crimes (Justin, *Apologia Minor* 12.17–26): 'For why did we not even publicly profess that these were the things which we esteemed good, and prove that these are the divine philosophy, saying that the mysteries of Saturn are performed when we slay a man, and that when we drink our fill of blood, as it is said we do, we are doing what you do before that idol you honour, and on which you sprinkle the blood not only of irrational animals, but also of men, making a libation of the blood of the slain by the hand of the most illustrious and noble man among you? And imitating Jupiter and the other gods in sodomy and shameless intercourse with woman, might we not bring as our apology the writings of Epicurus and the poets?'

50 Ibid. 21.1–17.

51 Ibid. 21.18–31.

52 Ibid. 21.22–37.

53 On the origin and function of demons in Justin, see L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 106–10. In general, see now the articles collected by S. Parvis and P. Foster (eds), *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

and not others, Justin was actually following a hidden agenda, since these figures now play an important role in his theory of the falsified Moses.

In fact, he affirms that by twisting what Genesis 49.10–11 says about Jesus,⁵⁴ the demons said that it was Dionysos who was begotten by Zeus, discovered wine and then ascended to heaven. In addition, not understanding the precise meaning of the prophecy, they also said that it was Bellerophon who on his horse Pegasus reached the heavens. According to Justin, when the demons heard from Isaiah 7.14 that Christ was to be born from a virgin (παρθενος) and ascend to heaven, they said it was Perseus who did so. The prophecy about Jesus in Psalm 18(19).6 was applied to Herakles⁵⁵ and Isaiah's prophecies about Jesus' miracles (Is. 35.5–6) were attributed to Asklepios.⁵⁶ As a result, Christians refuse to worship pagan deities because, as Justin affirms, through Jesus Christ, '(we) learned to despise these, though we be threatened with death for it, and have dedicated ourselves to the unbegotten and impassible God'.⁵⁷

Let us now proceed to Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos*. This apologetic writing used to be dated to soon after 150, but has recently been redated, on the basis of internal evidence, to between 165 and 172.⁵⁸ In it, Tatian adopts a rather aggressive tone which, to a certain extent, is new in the genre. The accumulation of names of Greek philosophers in chapters 2 and 3 of his *Address to the Greeks* might, at first sight, give the impression that Tatian is better informed about the philosophical theories on the divine than he actually is.⁵⁹ In fact, a closer look immediately reveals not only the topical nature of his criticism,⁶⁰ but also his debt to Justin, his only innovation being the aggressive tone and the consequent transformation of the *tu quoque* fallacies of his master into arguments *ad personam*. The only philosophical view he

54 Genesis 49.10–11, 'A ruler shall not fail from Judah, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of nations. Binding his foal to the vine, and the foal of his ass to the branch of it, he shall wash his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape.'

55 Psalm 18(19).6, 'His going forth is from the extremity of heaven, and his circuit to the *other* end of heaven: and no one shall be hidden from his heat.'

56 See the references to Isaiah 7.14, Psalm 18(19).6 and Isaiah 35.5–6 in Justin, *1 Apol.* 54.8; 54.9 and 54.10, respectively.

57 Justin, *1 Apol.* 25.1–13, at 6–7.

58 See M. Marcovich, *Tatiani Oratio ad Grecos* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 1–3, who mentions Tatian's reference to the death of his master Justin (c. 165) as a *terminus post quem*.

59 See Tatian *Or.* 2–3, for the superficial references to Diogenes, Aristippus, Plato, Aristotle, Heraclitus, Zeno, Socrates, Empedocles, Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Crates.

60 See, for example, Diogenes Laertius 6.23.76, for his reference to Diogenes; 2.78, for Aristippus; Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Plato* 3.8, for his reference to Plato.

actually deals with in more detail, the Stoic conflagration, appears to be a reworking of his master Justin. While Justin could, with reservations, still compare the Last Judgement to the Stoic theory of *ekpyrosis*,⁶¹ Tatian now postulates the resurrection both of soul and body at the Last Judgement in order to stress the differences.⁶² In point of fact, as Miroslav Marcovich has convincingly argued against the opinion of Harnack, Tatian's treatise borrows extensively from Justin and develops his themes and motifs.⁶³

As was to be expected, Tatian's attack on Greek gods also relies on Justin. He uses similar examples and criticizes the same issues. On the one hand, he associates Greek gods with demons, although the argument is to some extent radicalized: Greek gods are no more an invention of demons but are demons themselves (below). On the other hand, he criticizes their immorality,⁶⁴ but then, instead of rejecting them on moral grounds, he proceeds to denounce their 'contradictions': 'how are those beings to be worshipped among whom there exists such a great contrariety of opinions?'⁶⁵

Tatian's attack on mythology and astrology occupies chapters 8 to 10 of his *Address to the Greeks*. He begins his criticism of the Greek gods (= demons) by censuring their being subject to passions, their doubtful morality, and the bad example they give:

καὶ μήτι γε οἱ δαίμονες αὐτοὶ μετὰ τοῦ ἡγουμένου αὐτῶν Διὸς ὑπὸ τὴν εἰμαρμένην πεπτῶκασι, τοῖς αὐτοῖς πάθεσιν οἷσπερ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι κρατηθέντες. οἱ γὰρ τοὺς μονομαχοῦντας βλέποντες καὶ θάτερος θατέρῳ σπουδάζων <θεός>, καὶ ὁ γαμῶν καὶ παιδοφθορῶν καὶ μοιχεύων, γελῶν τε καὶ ὀργιζόμενος, φεύγων τε καὶ τιτρωσκόμενος πῶς οὐχὶ θνητὸς εἶναι νομισθήσεται; Δι' ὧν <περ> γὰρ ἑαυτοῦς, ὁποῖοι τινες πεφύκασι, τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πεφανερώκασι, διὰ τούτων τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἐπὶ τὰ ὅμοια προὐτρέψαντο.⁶⁶

And are not the demons themselves, with Zeus at their head, subjected to Fate, being overpowered by the same passions as men? But must not those who are spectators of single combats

61 Justin, *1 Apol.* 20.

62 Tatian, *Or.* 3.12–15, 6.1–8.

63 Markovich, *Tatiani*, pp. 1–3; compare Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, p. 286 n. 4.

64 Tatian, *Or.* 8.10–12.

65 Ibid. 8.18–19. Greek text according to Marcovich, *Tatiani*; English translation according to J. E. Ryland, in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers. 1: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1867).

66 Tatian, *Or.* 8.10–17; compare Justin, *1 Apol.* 21.22–7 (above).

and are partisans on one side or the other, and he who marries and is a paederast and an adulterer, who laughs and is angry, who flees and is wounded, be regarded as mortals? For, by whatever actions they manifest to men their characters, by these they prompt their hearers to copy their example.

After a short transition which should (but does not quite) clear up what he means by ‘contradictions’, he includes several mythical references (among which one easily discerns some of Justin’s examples⁶⁷) and some attempts to ridicule the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The most interesting issue of his exposition is perhaps his conception of the Zodiac as invented by demons and the already mentioned association of these demons (planets) with the Greek gods. They not only keep humans ensnared in the chains of fate, but also enjoy themselves playing with human fortune. This theme, hinted at at the beginning of chapter 8, is developed in chapter 9:

ἡ γὰρ τοῦ ζωδιακοῦ κύκλου γραφή θεῶν ἐστὶ ποίημα, καὶ τὸ ἐπικρατῆσαν, ὥς φασιν, ἐνὸς αὐτῶν φῶς τοὺς πλείονας παραβραβεύει, καὶ ὁ νικώμενος νῦν εἰσαυθὶς ἐπικρατεῖν εἴωθεν· εὐαρεστοῦσι δὲ αὐτοῖς οἱ ἐπὶ πλανῆται, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τοῖς πεσσοῖς ἀθύροντες.⁶⁸

For the delineation of the zodiacal circle is the work of gods. And, when the light of one of them predominates, as they express it, it deprives all the rest of their honour; and he who now is conquered, at another time gains the predominance. And the seven planets are well pleased with them, as if they were amusing themselves with dice.

There are clear Gnostic undertones about this notion, not only in the implicit association of the gods or planets with evil rulers governing the sublunary world and taking pleasure at human *fatum*. More important is perhaps the theological dualism, implicit in the description of the Christian God being above these lower gods, and the anthropological dualism behind Tatian’s statement that Christians are above fate and the rule of the planets:

ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ εἰμαρμένης ἐσμὲν ἀνώτεροι καὶ ἀντὶ πλανητῶν δαιμόνων καὶ εἰμαρμένης ἐσμὲν ἀνώτεροι καὶ ἀντὶ πλανητῶν δαιμόνων ἕνα τὸν

67 Such as his references to Zeus, Aphrodite, Apollo, Athena and Cybele. For the text of Justin, see previous note.

68 Tatian, *Or.* 9.10–17.

ἅπλανῇ δεσπότην μεμαθήκαμεν καὶ οὐ καθ' εἰμαρμένην ἀγόμενοι τοὺς ταύτης νομοθέτας παρητήμεθα.⁶⁹

But we are superior to Fate, and instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Lord who wanders not; and, as we do not follow the guidance of Fate, we reject its lawgivers.

3 THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

Thus far Greek philosophy has only appeared in the background and has been mainly visible in the either rudimentary or more developed negative theology applied by the apologists in their definition of God. However, not only do authors such as Athenagoras and Theophilus of Antioch assume the rational criticism of religion by Greek philosophers as their predecessors did, but we also find them attacking the philosophical theories regarding the divine.

Athenagoras, 'philosopher and Christian', as the title of the *Plea for the Christians* describes him, indeed adopts quite a different approach from that of his forerunners. The text is dated to 177 and in it, to side with Marcovich, Athenagoras 'employs the full range of his philosophical . . . erudition and Christian education to convince' the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. Probably due to the fact that Marcus Aurelius himself was a philosopher, and thanks to Athenagoras' own philosophical qualification as a teacher of philosophy, the *Legatio pro Christianis* occupies a singular place among the extant apologetic treatises due to the higher quality of style and content.

With regard to the theme we are dealing with, his criticism includes the now familiar motifs of idolatry and anthropomorphism, but his is not a simple repetition of *loci communes*. Athenagoras adds new arguments to substantiate his disapproval, adorning them with numerous quotations from Greek poets and philosophers, of which the *apparatus fontium* in Marcovich's edition provides due testimony.⁷⁰ It

⁶⁹ Ibid. 9.14–17.

⁷⁰ On the philosophical background, see J. Geffcken, *Zwei griechische Apologeten* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907); A. J. Malherbe, 'The structure of Athenagoras' *Supplicatio pro Christianis*', *VigChris* 23 (1969), pp. 1–20, and 'Athenagoras on the poets and philosophers', in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann (eds), *Kyriakon: Festschrift J. Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), pp. 214–25; L. W. Barnard, *Athenagoras: A Study in Second Century Christian Apologetic* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), and 'the philosophical and theological background of Athenagoras', in J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (eds), *Epektasis: Mélanges Jean Daniélou* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), pp. 3–16. See also, more recently, M. Marcovich, *Athenagoras Legatio pro Christianis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), p. 3 n. 8, 3–14 and the *apparatus fontium*.

is noteworthy that Athenagoras, who was probably acquainted with Celsus' reply to Christian attacks on idolatry,⁷¹ no longer equates statues with gods, as was the norm for the early apologists. In point of fact, the transition from his critique of sacrifice and idols⁷² to that of myths⁷³ is precisely based on this point:

Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν φασὶ τινες εἰκόνας μὲν εἶναι ταύτας, θεοὺς δὲ ἐφ' οἷς αἱ εἰκόνες, καὶ τὰς προσόδους, ὥς ταύταις προσίστασιν, καὶ τὰς θυσίας ἐπ' ἐκείνους ἀναφέρεισθαι καὶ εἰς ἐκείνους γίνεσθαι, μὴ εἶναι τε ἕτερον τρόπον τοῖς θεοῖς ἢ τοῦτον προσελθεῖν.⁷⁴

It is affirmed by some that, although these are only images, yet there exist gods in honour of whom they are made; and that the supplications and sacrifices presented to the images are to be referred to the gods, and are in fact made to the gods; and that there is not any other way of coming to them.

Athenagoras' criticism, in 20.1–38, of the gods' anthropomorphic features and immorality also includes new elements. Admittedly, he opens the section with the known references to the various emascuations and cannibalistic episodes of Zeus' saga, together with the mention of his incest committed with Rhea. But he complements these stories with new issues, such as elements proceeding from the Orphic cosmogony attributed to Hieronymus and Hellanicus.⁷⁵

Most interesting for us is his attack on the allegorical interpretations of the gods as natural forces. Far from the *ad hominem* arguments we are used to from previous apologists, his attack on philosophical views of the gods is no longer based on simple denigrations, but on the discussion of theories. Athenagoras disproves Empedocles' allegorizations on the grounds that if the gods are one of the elements, they must depend on something previous to them, namely Love and Strife, which combines and separates them. After quoting the Presocratic philosopher (B 6.2–3 D–K), he points out:

71 Apud Origenes, *Cels.* 7.62.

72 Athenagoras, *Legatio* 13.7–22 and 14.1–17.36, respectively.

73 Ibid. 18.7–21.67.

74 Ibid. 18.1–4. Against this view, see *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 11.4.1 and *Recognitions* 5.23–26.

75 See *OF* 2, 3, and 1 Bernabé, in A. Bernabé (ed.), *Poetae epici graeci: testimonia et fragmenta*, Pars II, fasc. 1–2: *Orphicorum et orphicis similium testimonia et fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 2004–5). A commentary on this cosmogony and Athenagoras' *Legatio* testimony in A. Bernabé, *Textos órficos y filosofía presocrática: materiales para una comparación* (Madrid: Trotta, 2004), pp. 35–41.

εἰ τοίνυν Ζεὺς μὲν τὸ πῦρ, Ἥρα δὲ ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ ἀήρ Ἀΐδωνεύς καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ Νῆστις, στοιχεῖα δὲ ταῦτα, τὸ πῦρ, τὸ ὕδωρ, ὁ ἀήρ, οὐδεὶς αὐτῶν θεός, οὔτε Ζεὺς, οὔτε Ἥρα, οὔτε Ἀΐδωνεύς· ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς ὕλης διακριθείσης ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ τούτων σύστασιν τε καὶ γένεσιν . . . ἃ χωρὶς τῆς φιλίας οὐ δύναται μένειν ὑπὸ τοῦ νείκουσιν συγγεόμενα, πῶς ἂν οὖν εἴποι τις ταῦτα εἶναι θεούς;⁷⁶

If, then, Zeus is fire, and Hera the earth, and Aidoneus the air, and Nestis water, and these are elements . . . none of them is a god . . . for from matter separated into parts by God is their constitution and origin . . . Here are things which without harmony cannot abide; which would be brought to ruin by strife: how then can any one say that they are gods?

In his view, by putting matter and its principle on the same level, we seem to be equating corruptible matter with the unbegotten, eternal and ever self-accordant God. In this conclusion we can already see that Athenagoras bases his criticism on a strict definition of the divine, achieved by applying the negative approach of middle Platonism. In fact, all subsequent sections close with a similar assertion.⁷⁷

The apologist then moves on to criticize other allegorizations, such as the Stoic equation of Zeus with the ‘fervid part of nature’, Hera with air and Poseidon with water. After briefly referring to Philodemus’ conception of Zeus as air of double nature (male–female) and the view that Kronos is ‘the turn of season’ regulating and balancing weather,⁷⁸ Athenagoras focuses on what for him are the apparent contradictions of Stoic views. If they admit that there is a one and supreme deity; that things are formed by the transformation of matter and that God’s spirit pervading matter takes a different name according to the latter’s different states; it seems clear that the different states of matter are the bodies of the gods. Following a known criticism of the theory of conflagration,⁷⁹ Athenagoras concludes:

φθειρομένων δὲ τῶν στοιχείων κατὰ τὴν ἐκπύρωσιν ἀνάγκη συμφθαρῆναι ὁμοῦ τοῖς εἶδεσι τὰ ὀνόματα, μόνου μένοντος τοῦ

76 Athenagoras, *Legatio* 22.6–10. The coincidence between these equivalences and the list included in Diogenes Laertius 8.76 shows indeed that Athenagoras has based his opinions on doxographical material.

77 Cf. Athenagoras, *Legatio* 22.30–4; 45–9; 52–3.

78 Philodemus, *De Pietate* 8.8 and Varro *apud* Augustine, *Civitas Dei* 4.10, respectively.

79 See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione* p. 226.10–20 Bruns; Plutarch, *De def. orac.* 426B; Origen, *C. Cels.* 1.21.

πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ. ὧν οὖν σωμάτων φθαρτὴ ἢ κατὰ τὴν ὕλην παραλλαγή, τίς ἂν ταῦτα πιστεύσαι θεοῦς;⁸⁰

but when the elements are destroyed in the conflagration, the names will necessarily perish along with the forms, the Spirit of God alone remaining. Who, then, can believe that those bodies, of which the variation according to matter is allied to corruption, are gods?

There follows criticism of a large number of allegorizations: Kronos as Time, Rhea as the Earth, Kronos' fury as the seasons' succession, Kronos' sojourn in the Tartarus as the obscure, cold and humid seasons. In Athenagoras' view, 'none of these is abiding; but the Deity is immortal, and immovable, and unalterable: so that neither is Kronos nor his image God'.⁸¹ After adding a couple more examples,⁸² he concludes:

καίτοι γε πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ θεολογοῦσιν οἱ τοὺς μύθους <*>. θεοποιοῦντες, οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι οἷς ἀπολογοῦνται ὑπὲρ τῶν θεῶν, τοὺς ἐπ' αὐτοῖς λόγους βεβαιοῦσιν.⁸³

And yet, in fact, they who refer the fables to actual gods, do anything rather than add to their divine character; for they do not perceive, that by the very defence they make for the gods, they confirm the things which are alleged concerning them.

Thus far Athenagoras. Let us now proceed to Theophilus of Antioch. The exact date of Theophilus of Antioch's *Ad Autolycum* is difficult to establish. The work consists of three books not only written at different times but also different in style.⁸⁴ Unfortunately this variety does not apply to the content and the work abounds in tedious repetitions.⁸⁵ While the date of the first two books is not wholly certain,

⁸⁰ Athenagoras, *Legatio* 22.29–32.

⁸¹ Ibid. 22.43–4.

⁸² Ibid. 22.48–61.

⁸³ Ibid. 22.62–4.

⁸⁴ According to M. Marcovich, *Theophili Antiocheni Ad Autolycum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), p. 3, the interval between the composition of books I and II is 'a few days' (*Ad Autolyc.* 2.1.1), but that between these and the third book might be longer, given that Autolycus is referred to differently from in the previous books (3.1.1).

⁸⁵ See R. M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch: Ad Autolycum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. x, and Marcovich's commentary (*Theophili*, 3): 'The assumption that the author was dealing with much the same topics on three occasions may

according to Robert Grant the third one was composed after the death of Marcus Aurelius.⁸⁶

In Theophilus we find again the aggressive and contemptuous tone of Tatian. While chapter 2 of the third book is very reminiscent of Tatian's personal attacks at the beginning of his *Address*, the transition to the third book is clear about his attitude towards Greek culture:

ταῦτα δέ φαμεν εἰς τὸ ἐπιδειῖσαι τὴν ἀνωφελῆ καὶ ἄθεον διάνοιαν αὐτῶν. Δόξης γὰρ κενῆς καὶ ματαίου πάντες οὗτοι ἐρασθέντες οὔτε αὐτοὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔγνωσαν οὔτε μὴν ἄλλους ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν προετρέψαντο.⁸⁷

We say these things to demonstrate their (the Greeks') useless and godless notions. All these, as lovers of empty and useless fame, neither knew the truths themselves nor impelled others towards the truth.

His criticism of Greek gods is topical and superficial. He names numerous philosophers and poets, but he seldom goes into detail, giving in this way the impression of relying on collections of philosophical opinions rather than on direct knowledge of the passages in question.⁸⁸

All three books of *Ad Autolycum* include criticisms of the Greek gods. Theophilus' attack on idolatry and sacrifices revisits the simple old arguments of the first apologists. Once again, we find the equation of idols with gods, as was the norm before Athenagoras. At the outset of book 1, he follows the Psalmist in affirming that pagan deities 'neither see, nor hear, since they are idols and the work of men's hands', and this is a recurrent theme in his work.⁸⁹

This return to the old models is also visible in Theophilus' criticism of anthropomorphism, which mainly includes long lists of examples of immorality,⁹⁰ many of them already known from earlier apologists: Kronos eating his children, Zeus' incest, adulteries and pederasty, Dionysos' drunkenness, castrated Attis, Asklepios struck by lightning, etc., etc. Theophilus' ignoring of the issue of passions shows

explain the fact that the work as a whole is ill-organized, highly repetitious and even redundant.'

86 Cf. *Ad Autolyc.* 3.27. See Grant, 'The chronology', p. 30.

87 Theophilus, *Ad Autolyc.* 3.2.21–32.

88 See Grant, *Greek Apologists*, pp. 148–9.

89 Theophilus, *Ad Autolyc.* 1.1, 1.10, 2.2–2.3, 2.34, 2.36.

90 Ibid. 1.9–10, 3.3.11–23.

once again his lack of concern with philosophical or ethical issues, which had become normal from Aristides onwards.⁹¹

As far as the criticism of the philosophical views of the divine is concerned, Theophilus restricts himself to dealing superficially with the theological opinions of the Stoics and Platonists. His only objective is in fact to stress contradictions within the same school in order to reject all of them on the grounds of inconsistency. With regard to the former, he focuses exclusively on their views of God, the creation of the universe and God's relationship to it. Theophilus complains about the fact that some Stoics deny God's existence while others accept it; he then opposes the theory of the world's spontaneous generation to the view that the universe is uncreated and eternal. Finally he balances the rejection of divine providence against the view according to which God's spirit pervades matter.⁹²

As far as the Platonists are concerned, after approvingly quoting Plato's view of God in the *Timaeus* (28C 2–3) as 'uncreated, the father and the Maker of the universe', Theophilus criticizes the Platonists' assumption that uncreated matter is also God and was coeval with him,⁹³ because if this was so, God could not be the Maker of the universe.⁹⁴ In Theophilus' words:

εἰ δὲ θεὸς ἀγέννητος καὶ ὕλη ἀγέννητος, οὐκ ἔτι ὁ θεὸς ποιητὴς τῶν ὅλων ἐστὶν κατὰ τοὺς Πλατωνικοὺς, οὐδὲ μὴν μοναρχία θεοῦ δείκνυται, ὅσον τὸ κατ' αὐτοῦς. ἔτι δὲ καὶ ὥσπερ ὁ θεός, ἀγέννητος ὢν, καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος ἐστίν, οὕτως, εἰ καὶ ἡ ὕλη ἀγέννητος ἦν, καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος καὶ ἰσόθεος ἦν.⁹⁵

But if God is uncreated and matter is uncreated, then according to the Platonists God is not the Maker of the universe, and as far as they are concerned the unique sovereignty of God is not demonstrated. Furthermore, as God is immutable because he is uncreated, if matter is uncreated it must also be immutable, and equal to God.

In any case, this is all Theophilus adduces against philosophical theology, and he proceeds immediately to focus on poetical views of God and to underline the contradictions between philosophers and

91 See above, p. 000.

92 Theophilus, *Ad Autolyc.* 2.4.1–7.

93 Cf. H. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1879), p. 567, 13; 588, 17–18.

94 Theophilus, *Ad Autolyc.* 2.4.8–10.

95 Ibid. 2.4.11–14.

poets. First he censures Homer for saying that the Ocean was the origin of the gods, and this as everyone knows is just water,⁹⁶ and Hesiod for assuming the pre-existence of matter, but omitting how it was made.⁹⁷

εἰ γὰρ ἐν πρώτοις ἦν χάος, καὶ ὕλη τις προϋπέκειτο ἀγέννητος οὐσα, τίς ἄρα ἦν ὁ ταύτην μετασκευάζων καὶ μεταρρυθμίζων καὶ μεταμορφῶν;⁹⁸

He says this but he does not explain by whom they were made. If originally there was chaos, and a certain uncreated matter already subsisted, who was it who reshaped it, remodelled, and transformed it?

One more example will suffice to show Theophilus' literal way of interpreting the poets. After quoting Hesiod's hymn to the Muses,⁹⁹ he derides him for asking the Muses to relate how everything originated:

πῶς δὲ ταῦτα ἠπίσταντο αἱ Μοῦσαι, μεταγενέστεραι οὐσαι τοῦ κόσμου; ἢ πῶς ἠδύναντο διηγήσασθαι τῷ Ἡσιόδῳ, ὅπου δὴ ὁ πατήρ αὐτῶν οὐπω γεγένηται;¹⁰⁰

How did the Muses know these things when they originated later than the world? How could they describe them to Hesiod when their father had not yet been born?

CONCLUSIONS

It is now time to draw to a close and offer some conclusions. At first sight the analysis of all the representative examples of apologetic attacks on pagan deities places before us a clear thematic pattern which develops in three stages. Our testimonies can be included in an evolutionary scheme, in so far as they do not substitute one motif for another, but simply add the new motif to the older ones proceeding from tradition.

Whereas in a first stage the contents and objectives of the apologists are rather simple and straightforward, as time goes by, arguments and motifs against pagan deities seem to increase gradually.

In a second stage, and thanks to the input of Greek philosophical

⁹⁶ Ibid. 2.5.1–10.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 2.6.1–24.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 2.6.18–20.

⁹⁹ Hes. *Th.* 104–10 and 112–15.

¹⁰⁰ Theophilus, *Ad Autolyc.* 2.5.33–5.

tradition, apologists were able to surmount the sterile ground of a criticism exclusively based on idolatry and sacrifices. The appropriation of pagan definitions of God that we see in Aristides, Justin and Tatian not only provided the apologists with a more consistent conceptual framework and a wider basis for their attack on pagan deities. It also allowed them to adopt the critical approaches to pagan religion of the Greeks themselves and to take advantage of the numerous inter-school polemical disputes.

This appropriation was not without consequences, however. Once the apologists had adopted the philosophical approach to divinity, they were trapped in the conceptual world of their adversaries. This is clear, in my view, in the third stage of this evolutionary scheme, as represented by Athenagoras and Theophilus of Antioch. Whereas a figure of the stature of Athenagoras could face the challenge and creatively turn Greek philosophical arguments against the Greek, an author without philosophical training such as Theophilus was caught in his own net. His frustration might, to a certain extent, explain his return to old Jewish motifs and, especially, the contemptuous character of his criticism.

It goes without saying that this sketched evolutionary framework within which I have analysed the apologists' view on the Graeco-Roman gods should be taken *cum grano salis*. Even though representing one of the evolutionary stages in this ideal scheme, any given author may already hint at or include elements of the following evolutionary stage. Moreover, our ignorance concerning the date of some texts and their mutual relationships might easily falsify our conclusions, for similarities among texts within a given thematic group might simply be the result of mutual dependence.¹⁰¹ As Aristotle warns us in the *Ethica Nicomachea*, 'general statements have an easier application, but the particular cases have a higher degree of truth'.¹⁰²

At any rate, what this evolutionary sketch does allow us to appreciate is the conceptual development of the authors, their interaction with their cultural environment and, more importantly, their appropriation of Graeco-Roman philosophy and terminology as a vehicle for their thoughts and beliefs in an effort to meet the cultural standards of their adversaries.

101 This is, for example, the case with Justin and Tatian and probably also with *KP* and *EP*. The case of Theophilus further shows that we cannot take an evolution in a chronological sense for granted. Although he does follow the model provided by Athenagoras, his lack of philosophical training prevents him from dealing properly with the philosophical theories he intends to criticize.

102 Aristotle, *EN* 1107a28 ff, Δεῖ δὲ τοῦτο μὴ μόνον καθόλου λέγεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἕκαστα ἐφαρμόττειν. ἐν γὰρ τοῖς περὶ τὰς πράξεις λόγοις οἱ μὲν καθόλου κοινότεροί εἰσιν, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ μέρους ἀληθινώτεροι.